Fig. 1. 'Gone with the Wind': London housewives demand maintenance of food subsidies in the April 1948 Budget.

‘The Tale of Sammy Spree’: Gender and the Secret Dynamics of 1940s British Corporatism

by James Hinton

Some years ago I came across a jingle in a 1947 factory newspaper which made me laugh out loud.[1] My laughter was quickly suppressed, inappropriate not only because professionals don’t behave like this in archives, but also because the joke, such as it was, revolved around a rather nastily sexist scenario of domestic violence. Getting the joke is a necessary part of the historian’s craft; a potentially fertile route into networks of meaning, the webs of associations and assumptions through which historical actors constructed their understanding of the world.[2] At first sight, however, the insight to be wrung from this particular joke was scarcely original.

Sammy Spree was a public-spirited engineering worker, who devoted much energy to saving fuel on the shop floor – this was 1947, the year the coal ran out closing down much of British industry for several weeks.[3] In the aftermath of the crisis Sammy made it his business to badger both his fellow workers and management into minimizing their consumption of electricity, not without raising some hackles:

> Now Sammy’s fancies, and his fads,
> Caused some resentment with the lads
> He even roused the Super’s ire
> By pointing to the office fire
> And, with a deprecating cough,
> Suggesting, ‘Why not switch it off?’

But switch off they did:

> Substantial saving was recorded
> And Sammy’s efforts were rewarded.

Behind the workplace good citizen, however, stood a spendthrift wife. In the private comfort of her home, Joan Spree was burning up electricity with no thought for the wider, public, implications of her behaviour:

> She found the temperature kept higher
> By using both bars on the fire:

She also used electric rings
And lots of other useful things.

When, finally, the quarterly bill arrived, revealing the extent of Joan's self-indulgence, Sammy's indignation knew no bounds. Reason disintegrated and violence took over:

Poor Sammy Spree threw several fits
He tore the quarter's bills to bits
And picking up a carving knife
He crept towards his cowering wife –
By now completely off his nut –
He gave her a Domestic Cut!

Recovering its poise, the tale concluded by urging workers to instruct their wives in the duties of citizenship:

The moral is: There's not much use
In saving every bit of juice
While you are working, if your spouse
Is wasting it within the house.
So tell your wives – it's time they faced it –
They're sabotaging when they waste it.

There is nothing surprising about the moralistic tone of voice. More than any other peace-time British government the post-war Labour administration subjected the population to a relentless diet of propaganda. 'We Work or We Want' – perhaps the defining slogan of the Attlee years – was coined in the immediate aftermath of the fuel crisis and adorned poster sites in every locality and the walls of up to 90,000 workplaces.[4] 'Idleness', declared the Chancellor of the Exchequer succinctly, 'is a crime.'[5] Despite reservations about the appropriateness of slogans that appeared to blame workers for hold-ups caused by shortages of fuel and raw materials, the general productivist message was taken up with enthusiasm by Whitehall's corporatist partners at the TUC (Trades Union Congress) and, at least until the Cold War put an end to Communist support for the Labour Government towards the end of 1947, by many shop-floor activists.[6] With less single-mindedness than the Communists, Britain's flourishing women's organizations were also willing to lend themselves to patriotic propaganda, often holding anti-socialist political sympathies in check:

Not selfishly spending,
But saving and mending
And working to see Britain through.[7]

This was a discourse pervaded with moralizing stereotypes – from the 'spivs and drones' of the black market 'who neither work nor want', to 'The Woman Who Wouldn't', Joan Spree's sister-in-crime, an anti-heroine of official propaganda who found it 'easy to cheat/ With light, petrol and heat', and had 'a pretty good time on the sly'.[8]

The underlying structures of Sammy's tale reflect familiar assumptions about gender and citizenship. Feminist writers in the 1980s explained how the founding fathers of liberal and democratic theory confined women to the private sphere of domestic life, excluding them from the public realm within which men exercised their citizenship. While seeking to expel the 'natural' hierarchies assumed by patriarchal rule from public life, Locke and Rousseau had simultaneously reaffirmed the legitimacy of patriarchy in the private sphere.[9] Despite the admission of women to the franchise after the First World War, prevailing notions of citizenship remained profoundly gendered.[10] The right to vote was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of citizenship, and until women could enter the public sphere on equal terms with men they would remain second-class citizens. Since the 1980s the heuristic value of the public/private distinction has been widely questioned by historians concerned to reconstruct the experience of real women in the past,[11] and recent work on the politics of consumption directly challenges Sammy Spree's assumption that the housewife was necessarily politically ignorant and unaware of the responsibilities of citizenship.[12] But such assumptions would have been normal among Sammy's shop-floor audience. Left to her own devices, the housewife would be likely to behave as selfish consumer. She needed to be taught her patriotic duty by a husband who had learned responsibility in the public world of the factory.[13]

Sammy Spree exemplifies the productivist mentality underpinning the confident self-assertion of the labour movement at the height of its power in the 1940s. It was a mentality that owed much to a masculine culture of craft pride which had little regard for the needs and capacities of the women workers in industry.[14] During the war, shop stewards had noisily put themselves at the forefront of efforts to increase production, using their patriotic alliance with the state to push back managerial prerogatives in the workplace. Since the later years of the war Joint Production Committees had been in precipitate decline and the unions seized on the 1947 fuel crisis as an opportunity to revive worker participation. The shop stewards at the British Aircraft Company in Bristol were in the forefront of the national campaign to establish joint Fuel Efficiency Committees during the crisis.[15] Like Sammy Spree they took a 'responsible' attitude towards helping the Labour Government through its difficulties:

> He knew the fuel and power position
> Was causing lots of agitation,
> So he did his best to help the nation . . .

In the rhetoric of shop floor productionism worker and citizen were seamlessly united.

The fact that Sammy badgered management as well as his fellow workers established his credentials as a class-conscious worker as well as a responsible citizen. And his fear that housewives would waste resources may well have been shared by fellow militants. Successful reconstruction, the engineering unions insisted, pursuing a policy of engagement with economic policy unusual in British trade-union history, demanded that top priority be given to the production of capital goods – the machines without which British industry would be unable to close the export gap.[16] Calling on Whitehall to prevent engineering firms seeking quick profits by producing 'frivolous' consumption goods rather than concentrating on the essential, but less immediately profitable, capital goods needed for national reconstruction, trade-union activists sometimes imagined themselves embattled against a conspiracy of capitalists and female consumers. It was in this spirit that one leading Communist union organizer listed electric irons alongside 'fancy broaches' as examples of the kind of profitable knick-knacks on which unpatriotic employers were squandering the nation's resources.[17]

JOKE WORK

If Sammy's reminder to his fellow workers that their wives might, in the privacy of their homes, be engaged in 'sabotaging' the national effort lay well within the normal range of contemporary public discourse, the penalty proposed was unusual. The joke, intended for consumption among the lads on the shop floor, lay primarily in its over-the-top denouement. Cutting women is funny. Obviously.

Sammy was excluded from an earlier publication of mine (*Shop Floor Citizens*) because the tale contains a surplus of meaning, meaning that could not be fully probed within the conceptual framework I was then employing. Something more was going on in this jingle than the confident, class-conscious self-assertion of the male worker. What had made me laugh out loud was not just the appropriateness of the jingle to the subject I was then researching, but also the inappropriateness of its denouement. In Freud's account of the joke-work, the joker is often taken unawares, the joke welling up from the unconscious like dream images bringing repressed thoughts, well-disguised, into consciousness.[18] Of course it was the job of the citizen-worker to instruct his less-than-citizen wife in responsible behaviour. But why was it funny to knife her? What repressed anxieties underlay Sammy's disproportionate response to his wife's extravagance?

While the Tale's explicit moral is about instructing wives in their public duties, the language in which the assault is explained is that of the cuckold:

> At quarter-end, our Sammy Spree
> Found that the electricity

Consumed at home was far, far more
Than he'd saved on the workshop floor
Because his wife played fast and loose
In using her domestic juice.

It is in a fit of *jealous* rage that Sammy knifes his wife. Fully to get the joke would be to understand the repressed anxieties to which it bears witness. One can imagine how, in the process of its composition, 'the downward drag on the still unsettled wording of the preconscious thought'[19] led Sammy Spree's creator to hit upon the rhyming of 'juice' with 'fast and loose', thereby introducing a motif of sexual jealously into a moral tale which, on the face of it, had no place for it. As he cast around for a suitable rhyme, the unconscious mind seized the opportunity to give voice to anxieties of which the author himself may well have been unaware. Perhaps both the author and his shop-floor readers laughed at Sammy Spree's 'nonsense' without understanding why the invitation to fantasize about cutting up wives gave them such pleasure. Whatever the psychological processes involved – and we can only speculate about those – sexual jealously got into the jingle somehow.

At this point the reader might reasonably object that I am making rather too much of the precise wording of what, after all, is only a piece of doggerel. That would be to misunderstand my purpose. I am not calling Sammy Spree in evidence; rather I am using him to open up neglected themes. The rhyme suggests certain questions; but the propositions I will advance in answer to them rest on substantial bodies of historical evidence far removed from comic verse or psychoanalytical speculation. Sammy, that is to say, is a heuristic device. This essay explores not only the personal politics of austerity, but also electoral politics, the role played by gender in 1940s corporatism, and attempts by women's organizations to claim a role in the governance of mid twentieth-century Britain. If the cuckolding of Sammy Spree can help us to see these issues in a new light, it does not matter that both he and his wife were fictions or that what the tale meant to its author or to his shop-floor audience must remain a matter of speculation.

So why was Sammy jealous? With whom did he suspect that Joan was 'playing fast and loose'?

FROM WALLET TO PURSE

Much of the existing literature on the history of the housewife in 1940s Britain tends to confirm Sammy's suspicion that inside every housewife was an irresponsible consumer trying to get out. This is the key argument of Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's widely-accepted account of the downfall of the Attlee government at the hands of housewives fed up after years of coping with austerity and shortages.[20] Labour politicians, hobbled on the electoral

battlefield by a puritanical productivist socialism which had no time for consumerist aspirations, were rejected by women attracted by Conservative promises of free-market affluence. Was it suspicion of a love affair with consumerism that drove Sammy into his jealous rage? Was the Conservative Party his wife's secret lover? If so, poor Joan was being falsely accused.

It is true that throughout the post-war years women were more likely to vote Conservative than men and that this fact, in itself, would be sufficient to account for Conservative electoral success in the 1950s. During the Attlee years, however, this trend was temporarily reversed. Between 1945 and 1950 there was actually a shift *towards* Labour in the female working-class vote, and it was disenchantment among a significant proportion of working-class men which accounted for Labour's electoral setback. Confronting the knee-jerk assumption that 'the women have let us down', Herbert Morrison, remarkable among Labour politicians for his sensitivity to issues of gender, pointed out at the time that the major cause of Labour's setback in the 1950 election was the desertion of working-class *men*. Summing up the opinion-poll findings a Labour Party research worker reported: 'Labour dropped far more votes from working-class men than from the whole of the middle class. This turnover was offset somewhat by increased support from working-class women'.[21] By paying attention to the gender dynamics of 1940s corporatism we may be able to offer some explanation of these electoral trends.

The most convincing analyses of the ways in which state power operated in mid twentieth-century Britain have focused on the interface between the expanding Whitehall machine on the one hand and the corporate worlds of organized business and organized labour on the other. Existing accounts present corporatism as a gender-free zone, depending on an ongoing negotiation of consent between Whitehall and the peak organizations of the Federation of British Industries and the Trades Union Congress and, more diffusely, on the fostering of consent in a culture of 'industrial diplomacy' involving Whitehall departments, individual trade associations and trade unions, and, to some degree, representatives of shop-floor workers.[22] Although women were generally absent from these corridors of power, issues of gender relations lay at the heart of the historic compromise wrought by Ernest Bevin, the dominating figure on the home front as wartime Minister of Labour. The maintenance of productive effort and social peace, essential to both war-making and reconstruction, owed a great deal to Bevin's ability to persuade the trade unions to accept an anti-inflationary trade-off between voluntary wage restraint and an enhanced social wage paid in the form of welfare benefits and statutory price control.[23] After the war the Treasury was reluctantly forced to accept that holding down the cost of living by escalating expenditure on food subsidies was essential to persuading trade unions not to exploit acute labour shortages to push up wages.[24] The revenue necessary to do this was raised primarily by taxes on alcohol and tobacco, taxes which by the late 1940s were bringing

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Fig. 2. Leaflet issued by Ministry of Fuel and Power, 1943 (cartoon by H. Bateman), reproduced from The Power of the Poster, ed. M. Timmers, V&A Publications, 1998.

in nearly as much as income tax and were by themselves sufficient to pay the entire cost not only of food subsidies but also of the National Health Service and of family allowances, the latter paid directly to the mother after a backbench revolt when they were introduced in 1944.[25] Since beer and tobacco were consumed disproportionately by men,[26] this fiscal regime produced a significant redistribution of resources within the working-class family.[27] Throughout the 1940s the continuing viability of macro-economic policy depended on the response of male trade-unionists to a fiscal regime that systematically shifted resources from their wallets to the purses of their wives.[28]

During the 1940s economic policy-makers and their trade-union partners displayed an almost wilful ignorance about the distribution of income within the family.[29] In the 1944–5 debate over whether family allowances should be paid directly to the mother, an issue that aroused great passion among women's organizations concerned to raise the status of motherhood, trade-union MPs reacted with outrage to middle-class feminist suggestions that this was necessary to prevent 'bad' husbands from misusing the money. For these men a fierce pride of class was involved in their defence of romanticized images of working-class family life as a site of egalitarian co-operation between husbands and wives.[30] Despite such attitudes, the reliance of trade-union negotiators on a cost-of-living index derived from family expenditure patterns as reported by housewives (who were usually ignorant of the level of their husbands' 'luxury' spending) served to facilitate the fiscal transfer from wallet to purse. Everyone knew that the cost-of-living index was outdated, but no-one appears to have understood that by manipulating purchase tax and subsidies with an eye to their impact on the index, the Treasury was unintentionally altering the distribution of income within the family. Paradoxically women's very ignorance of their husband's spending had turned the corporatist social contract, behind the backs of the gender-blind men who negotiated it, into what Michael Young, in a strikingly original, but subsequently neglected 1952 article, described as a 'family income equalisation pool'.[31]

Because the gender implications of this policy went unacknowledged, no-one attempted to measure the effects of the transfers at the time. Comparison with later studies, however, suggest that the redistribution of family income involved in 1940s fiscal policy must have substantially advantaged women (and children) at the expense of male wage-earners. In the late 1970s, for example, the phasing out of child tax allowances in favour of payment of child benefit to the mother produced a significant shift in household spending on clothes from men to women and children.[32] By the 1970s the political implications of monkeying with the distribution of income within the family were well understood – indeed the Callaghan Government had held back from phasing out child tax allowances precisely because of worries about the likely impact of this on trade-union support for wage restraint.[33] In the 1940s, however, state intervention in the distribution of

working-class family income was wrapped in a silence which has served to deafen historians to the political consequences of this policy. It would not be surprising if, as one of the few contemporary commentators on the 1950 General Election to show any awareness of the issue put it, the 're-alignment of voters evident in the General Election occurred within different income groups because of differing effects that particular combinations of benefits and burdens have on individuals.'[34] The fact that the working-class female Labour vote held up so much better than the male one in 1950 may plausibly be related to the proposition that the relative contentment of working-class wives with improved welfare services and subsidized food prices did not override their husbands' growing impatience with a social contract which rewarded wage restraint with the proceeds of taxation of luxury goods disproportionately consumed by men. By the late 1940s the primary concern of housewives was no longer with shortages and austerity but with rising prices, in the face of which most of them continued to look, not to the free-market solutions advocated by Conservatives and the right-wing Housewives' League, but to continuing controls, rationing and food subsidies.[35] In a comparative perspective, as one historian reviewing continental experience has noted, what is remarkable is not that support for rationing declined in Britain after the war, but rather 'the relatively high level of continuing popular support for food control' in the late 1940s.[36] In the longer term the inability of Labour to articulate a politics of consumer affluence may well have undermined its electoral appeal to women voters, as a number of recent historians have argued.[37] But it is important not to predate this trend. So long as Labour was in office its proportion of the female vote held up well. Indeed it is arguable that the largest single cause of the relative decline of Labour's electoral fortunes in the late 1940s was the male reaction against the cumulative impact of Bevin's historic compromise on the material independence, power and sense of well-being of the drinking, smoking, working-class bread-winner. Far from corporatism being a gender-free zone, issues of gender were central to its operations. But the real gender dynamics of 1940s corporatism were almost the reverse of Sammy Spree's equation between femininity and irresponsible consumerism. What seems to have happened, politically, is that working-class husbands revolted against the disciplines of Labour's macro-economic policy at a time when their wives, for good reason, remained more appreciative of a social wage which effectively transferred resources from the wage-earner's pay packet to the housewife's purse. Perhaps Joan's real offence was not indifference to the desires of the Labour Government, but altogether too great a responsiveness?

CITIZEN HOUSEWIFE

It has recently been argued that consumption provided a more fruitful site than production in generating practices of democratic citizenship in

twentieth-century Britain. Whether in the battles between free-traders and protectionists in the early years of the century, the elaboration of notions of fair shares during two world wars, or the contest between collectivist and free-market philosophies after 1945, the politics of consumption achieved a centrality in party politics unmatched by arguments about power and productivity in British industry.[38] Perhaps what Sammy's unconsciousness was trying to tell him was that Joan's claims to citizenship were no less real than his own. Might the slide into sexual imagery hint at a deeper anxiety, an anxiety occasioned not by the fear that wives might behave as selfish consumers – which, after all, would only confirm their incapacity for citizenship – but by the fact that, addressed directly by the state, they might become citizens in their own right, challenging the very roots of the masculine republic – the gendered separation of spheres?

Since the turn of the century, working-class women organized in the Women's Co-operative Guilds and the Labour Party had successfully created for themselves a public sphere in which they exercised effective political influence notwithstanding the patriarchal structures of the labour movement as a whole. Organizing themselves around issues of consumption and welfare, working-class housewives had played a key role in transforming the Labour Party from a mere representative of the trade-union interest into a national political party, and in so doing they created a female public sphere within which working-class women were more likely to gain a practical sense of their own citizenship than either as factory workers or as the recipients of lectures from their husbands.[39] In contrast to some later feminist assumptions, it was primarily as housewives rather than as wage-earners that working-class women were able to stake an effective claim to citizenship in the first half of the twentieth century. As Mary Sutherland, leader of the Labour women, noted at the time, the mobilization of women into industry during the second world war, far from expanding women's political horizons by rescuing them from domestic isolation, decimated the ranks of the Labour Party's women's sections.[40] Writing shortly after the war, Jenny Geddes, London organizer of Labour women, challenged the view 'that housewives generally have a narrower outlook and narrower interests or that they are less conscious of civic and political responsibilities than other women . . . I am prepared to affirm from experience of our own movement that the proportion of housewives who are actively interested in politics and civic affairs, is higher that the proportion of women in other employments'. Attacking patronizing talk about the 'awful dullness and dreariness of the housewife's job', Geddes argued that for all its difficulties under post-war conditions, housework had 'as much interest and variety as many factory and office jobs . . . It is time that housewives answered back when they hear their work described as dreary waste, and themselves as half-wits for doing it!'[41] Housewives, no less than their husbands, Labour women insisted, were 'citizens with a pride in their craft'.[42]

In the era of the two world wars consumption politics provided Labour

women with a major opportunity to assert their claims to citizenship. In conditions of acute resource scarcity, how the housewife performed her housework became a matter of intense concern to the state. If the major priority in wartime Britain was to maximize production, it was also crucial to minimize consumption, the British housewife 'gamely carrying on' became, according to Elizabeth Wilson, '*the* heroic figure' of much second-world-war propaganda.[43] Whitehall found itself making demands on the housewife to adapt her behaviour in her use of food, of textiles, of fuel for cooking, heating, cleaning and washing, thereby bringing her mundane activities under a public spotlight. Implicit in these multiplying discourses of austerity was a challenge to the traditional notion that it was by simply serving her family that the housewife served the state. Women were now being addressed directly by the state as citizens with citizen duties to perform in the everyday conduct of housework and homemaking. By treating the domestic sphere as if it was itself part of the public realm, the wartime state opened a route for organized women to claim their own place within the corporatist processes of governance. Austerity might correlate positively with women's citizenship. In a planned economy the idea that housewives, like workers, could exploit the state's need for organized partners to gain power as an estate of the realm did not appear entirely far-fetched.[44]

The basis of corporatism was ongoing negotiation between organized interest groups. If working-class women were to make full use of the opportunities provided by discourses of austerity for enhancing their claims to full participation in citizenship, then their organizations needed to gain recognition as bargaining partners with the planning state alongside the peak organizations of other interest groups. How successful were they in doing this?

During the war leaders of the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations (SJC), which represented the main organizations of Labour women, had sought to position themselves as mediators between Whitehall and the housewife. By combining patriotic understanding of the need for austerity with sensitivity to the practical problems faced by ordinary housewives the SJC sought to realize in wartime its oft-repeated claim to be 'the housewives' trade union'.[45] From the start of the war Labour women had kept a vigilant eye on the impact of austerity on working-class housewives. The establishment of local Food Control Committees, consisting of trader and consumer representatives appointed by local authorities, gave them an opportunity to participate in the administration of food control.[46] This represented, however, only a very minor toehold in the polity: unlike their pioneering equivalents in the first world war these local committees never amounted to more than 'a safety valve for discontent and a shield against accusations of bureaucracy'.[47] In order to influence the development of food policy the Labour women needed direct access to Whitehall. In February 1941, responding to popular

discontent over the shortage of unrationed foods, the SJC drew up a series of demands for the extension of rationing, more equitable distribution, and price controls.[48] Over the following months many of these demands were met, culminating in the introduction of points rationing in November 1941 – a flexible scheme under which consumers could exchange coupons for a range of goods currently in short supply. While Labour women remained critical about continuing inequalities in the distribution system, public discontent rapidly died away.[49] Although Mary Sutherland subsequently claimed that Labour women had been instrumental in persuading the Ministry of Food to extend rationing, there is no evidence that they had any such influence. In the spring of 1941 the popular Food Minister, Lord Woolton, refused even to meet with a deputation from the Labour women.[50]

In response to rebuffs of this kind the women persuaded the Labour Party, in the autumn of 1941, to press for the establishment of a broadly representative Consumer Council. Such a Council had existed between 1917 and 1920, and through it the labour movement had been able to position itself as the main defender of the consumer against 'profiteering capitalists' and the 'organized forces of the trading community'.[51] Woolton resisted, arguing that it was more appropriate to handle Whitehall's relationship with the 'unorganized consumer' through the media of press, radio and opinion polls, than by giving the 'so-called' representative organizations of housewives an inflated sense of their own importance.[52] This reflected the Food Ministry view, thrashed out a few months earlier after the ex-Labour politician, J. R. Clynes, who had been instrumental in establishing the first world war Consumer Council, had proposed a similar initiative in parliament.[53] Some officials, worried by the extent of public and parliamentary criticism of the Food Ministry during the spring of 1941, had wanted to respond positively to Clynes's proposal.[54] The risk of a Consumer Council 'setting up against the department and becoming a fifth wheel to the coach' was not great, they argued: as in the last war, Council members would be likely to accept ministerial policy once it was properly explained to them, enabling them to act as 'unpaid propagandists in the country'.[55] On the difficult question of the representational basis of the Council, the advocates disagreed. One official proposed that the Minister appoint leading women from the Labour and Conservative Parties, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Women's Institutes, etc; and that he should not be afraid to appoint 'outspoken critics like [the campaigner for family allowances, Eleanor] Rathbone . . . We need forceful critics and influential leaders of opinion'. The Council, he proposed, should be chaired, not by the Ministry, but by an independent public figure. Other advocates, more impressed by the dangers involved, warned against: 'a Committee composed of "names" or nominees of so-called consumer representative bodies', fearing that its chairman could become a popular rival to the Minister himself. Instead they proposed a Council nominated from the local

Food Control Committees, thus preventing any direct representation of the women's groups. This disagreement laid bare a serious problem in all efforts to promote consumer representation, as a more senior official was quick to point out. Recalling the first-world-war Consumer Council as 'just a noisy Communist rabble',[56] he could see no way in which such a body could be representative. Unlike the TUC and the traders' associations with whom the Ministry presently dealt, 'there is no body of consumers who will take a lively interest and a continuing one in the activities of their "representative" on any such Council . . .' However it was constituted, the Council would be 'a miscellaneous collection of individuals responsible to no one . . .'.[57]

The reference to the TUC is significant, and it points to a fundamental weakness in the Labour women's claim to act as the housewives' trade union. Woolton's determination to resist proposals for a consumer council was reinforced by the attitude of the TUC which made it clear that it would resent any attempt by the Labour Women to encroach on its own status as the chief representative of working-class opinion. From the outbreak of war the TUC had established, at Whitehall's request, an advisory committee which met regularly with the Ministry of Food.[58] This Committee had only one woman member – representing wage-earning women not housewives – and it was exclusively concerned with the interests of wage-earners, particularly with the vexed issue of extra rations for those workers who could not get supplementary off-ration foods in works canteens.[59] These workers included miners and agricultural labourers, but not, in the TUC's view, mothers at home with young children, who – as Eleanor Rathbone among others had pointed out – were equally victims of a system of partial rationing supplemented by off-ration eating in canteens and restaurants.[60] In the summer of 1940, when the acute shortage of tea was provoking loud complaints from working-class housewives, the TUC was interested only in lobbying on behalf of wage-earners in hot and thirsty jobs.[61] Within the Ministry of Food advocates of a Consumer Council pointed out that the Advisory Committee was 'too narrow' either to give Whitehall the feedback it needed about the views of working-class housewives or to help the Ministry in establishing its own credibility with them.[62] Nevertheless, the TUC insisted on its right to represent working-class consumers in general, and was, for example, greatly put out when the Ministry approached the Labour Women directly to provide representatives of working-class housewives for a special advisory body on food economy, rather than asking the TUC to nominate the representatives.[63]

Labour women might be invited to discuss food economy, but, when they demanded a Consumer Council, Woolton had no hesitation in citing his 'constant' discussions with the TUC as a major reason for resisting.[64] When the trade-union Advisory Committee discussed the issue members recalled the first world war experiment with distaste, and were disinclined to encourage the creation of a rival to their own claim to represent consumers.[65]

Subsequently the TUC confirmed that it was unable to support the demand, and this effectively prevented the Labour Party from pressing the issue.[66] After lengthy discussion at the Party's National Executive, it was eventually decided that, the demand should be dropped in favour of a modest request to Woolton to consult with the Labour women 'when giving consideration to matters of rationing, prices and food distribution.'[67] Woolton had no difficulty in accepting this formulation, and there the matter rested.[68] However valuable support from women's organizations might be in winning female consent to austerity, Whitehall felt no need to offer them the kind of status granted to representatives of business or of workers.[69] In relation to the Consumer Council in the first world war it has been argued that Labour women were able to negotiate 'something of a union between the purse and the pay packet', not so much articulating an independent housewives' interest as achieving its effective incorporation within the pursuit of working-class interests as a whole.[70] However true this may have been of the earlier period, the behaviour of the TUC during the second world war suggests a rather less comfortable accommodation between class and gender. The opportunities created by the war economy for Labour women to claim space within the corporatist polity were critically limited by the patriarchal structures of a labour movement which perceived the independent representation of women's interests at the level of the state as a threat to its own authority. Behind the TUC's resistance to the claims of organized housewives for recognition as an independent estate of the realm lay something of the same anxiety which led Sammy Spree to reach for the carving knife.

NATION BEFORE HUSBAND?

Poor Joan sat on no committees, nor did she aspire to walk the corridors of corporatist power. She was, nevertheless, caught up in the mechanisms of corporatism. In the aftermath of the 1947 fuel crisis Whitehall was anxious to take the message of fuel economy directly to the housewife. Following consultations with the main women's organizations, the Ministry of Fuel launched a campaign for domestic fuel economy aimed at achieving a 25% reduction in consumption compared to the previous summer. To inculcate 'fuel awareness', leaflets and press advertising were to be supplemented so far as possible by personal visits. While the ladies of Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) saw this campaign as a way of reviving their wartime street-level organization, Communist women, emulating the success of their shop-steward husbands in enhancing their power through Joint Production Committees in the factories, entertained visions of housewives' leaders managing street fuel targets, acting as agents of the state in the household, policing the disciplines of austerity on behalf of the wider community.[71] Nothing came of this. WVS plans for house-to-house visiting seem to have amounted in practice to very little,[72] and a survey conducted in August 1947

showed that only 2% of housewives were reading their meters once a week (the basic goal of the campaign), while 85–90% never read them at all.[73] When the summer of 1947 turned out to be as hot as the winter had been cold the imperative for domestic fuel economy quickly faded away, together with the more drastic plans for domestic fuel rationing that had been debated, but rejected, in Whitehall.[74]

Five years earlier, during the war, Mass-Observation (M-O) had closely monitored women's responses to a similar campaign for domestic-fuel economy. What they discovered was that to the limited degree that women responded to the state's address, they took the burden on themselves, doing the housework in the cold but lighting or turning on the fire to warm the house before their husbands came home in the evening. In line with this M-O urged Whitehall to concentrate its propaganda on those savings the housewife could make without affecting the comfort of other family members: for example, by persuading women to abandon the common habit of creating a constant supply of hot water by keeping kettles simmering on the hob all day long.[75] It was quite unreasonable, they argued, for Whitehall to expect women to place the public need for economy before their private duty to provide for the needs of their families:

> To the average working-class woman, the profoundest instinct of her daily life is that of keeping her husband and family as warm, well-fed, and comfortable as her means allow . . . To tell her that this is *not* her first duty, is a very grave responsibility for any government to take upon itself; and the task of making her believe it to the extent of actually taking deliberate steps to make her husband and family less comfortable and contented is an almost superhuman one . . . It demands a gigantic and revolutionary change in her whole outlook on life, and in the relations between herself and her family.[76]

Was this the change that Sammy's creator feared? Was the joke-image of Joan, the cowering guilty consumer, actually conjured by his unconscious precisely to represent a contrary fear – that Joan the dutiful citizen might place her new-found loyalty to the state ahead of her duties to husband and family? If Joan started to behave as though the home was itself part of the public sphere, then the very foundations of patriarchal power would indeed be under threat. By opening up a direct relationship between government and housewives behind the backs of their husbands, the discourse of austerity potentially undermined the privileged association between masculinity and citizenship. If the 'juice' with which Joan played 'fast and loose' was in reality no longer merely 'domestic', but served to lubricate her independent intercourse with the state, who was now master in the home?

In reality, such fears were groundless. Behind his back Joan – like the dutiful retired schoolmistress who confided to M-O that sitting without a fire at home made her 'feel all patriotic'[77] – might choose to enact good

citizenship by shivering at the behest of her secret lover, but she did so only to reserve as much as possible of her 'domestic juice' for the daily return of the patriarch.[78] Fuel wasting was a privilege of the better off. Most working-class wives saved fuel out of economic necessity, perhaps reinforced by patriotism: but not to the extent of jeopardizing the health of their children or the comfort of their husbands. A Kilburn builder's wife kept a warm room for her three-month old daughter but, as she put it:

> before she come . . . I used to keep warm working (sic) about, and if I got cold . . . sometimes I tell you what I'd do: when my feet got real frozen up, I'd light up the oven and sit there in the passage for five minutes with my feet in the oven! Oh you'd a'laughed to see me some of those mornings last winter. But it's a grand way to warm your feet, you know, you get them warmed right through, and that seems to warm you all over . . . I never didn't used to light a fire till Sid come home.[79]

Few state officials would have dissented from Mass-Observation's view that the primacy given by wives to meeting the needs of their husbands and children was 'in the long run . . . of more value to a nation (even a nation at war) than any amount of fuel'.[80] Those who called on housewives to 'put nation before husband' were likely to provoke an outraged response from both men and women, as the leader of WVS had discovered to her cost in 1944.[81]

The claims of citizenship could not easily be reconciled with the claims of domesticity, and any housewife bold enough – or gullible enough – to reconstitute herself as a fully-fledged democratic subject, was likely to encounter the sharpest contradictions between the demands of her new public identity and the insistent pull of private family interest. In 1942 Mass-Observation had argued that the only sure way of cutting through the anxieties created for women by such 'conflict between family affection and patriotism' was to introduce fuel rationing. By removing from the housewife the burden of responsibility for austerity, rationing would free her to 'follow her primitive instincts to provide the best she could for her family, even though the best is now reduced'.[82] Both for this reason, and because targets expressed in percentage terms did nothing to curb the disproportionate use of fuel by the better off, Labour women argued for rationing, as against voluntary restraint, both in 1942 and in 1947.[83]

CONCLUSION

In the personal politics of austerity women were as likely to behave as responsible citizens as were men. Indeed the contrary movements of opinion between 1945 and 1950 suggest that working-class women may have been rather more inclined to support the political economy of austerity than were their husbands. I have argued that the trade-off at the

heart of 1940s corporatism between wage restraint and an enhanced social wage, which systematically redistributed resources from the wallet to the purse, gave women good material reasons for opposing any quick return to the free play of market forces. The fall of the Attlee Government may in part be attributed to a male revolt against such redistributive interference in the family economy. These gender dynamics of corporatism went largely unrecognized at the time, although the TUC's heavy-handed defence of its exclusive – and implausible – right to represent the working-class consumer suggests a degree of alarm among male trade-unionists about the possibility that women might make use of the corporatist economy to assert themselves as fully-fledged citizens. By addressing the housewife directly as a citizen responsible for administering austerity, the state threatened to undermine a central pillar of masculinity: privileged access to the public sphere, sustained by the private services of womenfolk whose primary responsibilities were to the particularities of home and family, not to any more universal conception of the public good. While explicitly feminist demands for a radical reconstruction of gender relations in the domestic sphere remained muted during the 1940s, incipient male panic at the threat to comfort and power represented by discourses of austerity which urged women to put 'nation before husband' may well have been lurking not far below the surface. The corporatist address to the housewife contained an implicit challenge to those gendered notions of the separation of public and private spheres which remained fundamental to masculine identity in mid twentieth-century Britain. So firmly did this notion structure Sammy Spree's sense of himself that the idea that what Joan might have been doing behind his back was saving, not wasting, fuel would never have occurred to him, even though, as his language reveals, he was dimly aware that something untoward had been going on. Sammy Spree's language of sexual jealousy provides a clue to the secret dynamics of gender at the heart of British corporatism. Perhaps I should have laughed louder in the archive, in order to alert my fellow professionals to the possibilities inherent in the concept of gender for rewriting a history that, to date, remains blind to its operations.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 'Watt Nonsense!', *Contact*, Official Organ of the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee at British Aircraft Company (Aircraft and WED Development Departments), Bristol, no. 15, December 1947, p. 15; in Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

2 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York, 1985. Comic verse was a common feature of factory papers. For discussion of these papers see Eddie and Ruth Frow, *Engineering Struggles. Episodes in the Story of the Shop Stewards' Movement*, Manchester, 1982, pp. 366–436, and Richard Croucher, *Engineers at War, 1939–1945*, London, 1982, pp. 317–20. My attempts to trace Sammy Spree himself – was he a character in music hall song, for example? – have been unsuccessful.

3 Alex J. Robertson, *The Bleak Midwinter: 1947*, Manchester, 1987.

4 William Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion? Propaganda in Britain after 1945*, London, 1989, pp. 12, 40.

5 Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?*, p. 46.

6 James Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain*, Aldershot, 1994, pp. 166–7 and *throughout.*

7 Ministry of Information, 'Report to the Nation', no. 12, cited in Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?*, p. 99. On the women's organizations and austerity see James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class,* Oxford, 2002, pp. 167–76.

8 Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?*, p. 99.

9 Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Cambridge, 1989; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge, 1988; Sonya O. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain', *American Historical Review* 103, October 1998, pp. 1,167–73; Chantal Mouffe, 'Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community', in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy, Pluralism, Citizenship and Community*, ed. C. Mouffe, London, 1992; Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy,* London, 1991.

10 Susan Pedersen provided a compelling account of the gendered character of the 'Beveridgian welfare state' in which women 'merited concern only as the residual legatees of their citizen-husbands'. S. Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review* 94, 1990, pp. 985, 1,006; S. Pedersen, *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945,* Cambridge, 1993.

11 For a recent statement see K. Canning and Sonya O. Rose, 'Gender, Citizenship and Subjectivity: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations', *Gender and History* 13: 3, 2001, pp. 431–2, 436, 441.

12 Matthew Hilton argues that the public/private distinction is so misleading about the actual nature of people's lives as to be conceptually useless, and he offers in its place a focus on consumption as means of analysing the relationship between citizens and the state: M. Hilton, 'Class, Consumption and the Public Sphere', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35: 4, 2000, pp. 655–66.

13 This was an assumption shared by some of the Whitehall's official propagandists, who hoped to reach the housewife indirectly as increased shop-floor 'fuel awareness' penetrated back into the domestic sphere. G. H. Norton, memorandum, 12 March 1947, PRO INF 2 135.

14 Representatives of women workers were rare in the wartime Joint Production Committees, (Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens*, p. 119); and the most direct address to women workers in the issue of the factory paper which carried 'The Tale of Sammy Spree' was a feature on a beauty contest among the female workforce. Although Clare Wightman has shown that the attitude of male trade unionists towards women workers in the engineering industry often reflected tactical calculations which qualified any simply patriarchal response (C. Wightman, *More than Munitions. Women, Work and the Engineering Industries, 1900–1950*, London, 1999), there can be little doubt that engineering workers in mid-twentieth century Britain inhabited a profoundly sexist culture. Croucher, *Engineers at War*; Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, London, 1984.

15 Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens*, pp. 169–70; *New Propeller*, March and April 1947; National Production Advisory Council, Minutes, 3 Oct. 1946 and 6 July 1947; in TUC archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, 292/557.1/1.

16 Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens*, pp. 152–53.

17 Reg Birch, 'From the Engineering Workshop', *Labour Monthly*, July 1947, p. 222. In reality the iron was the only domestic electrical appliance, apart from the radio, to have penetrated the majority of working-class homes by the 1940s. Far from being a frivolous luxury, electric irons were more fuel efficient than the flat-iron alternative, as well as being massively labour saving for the hard-pressed housewife. 'It's a lovely little thing, and it do save the gas', enthused a working-class housewife in Kilburn to a Mass Observer in 1942: 'Before I got this I was for ever putting pennies in the gas when I was doing the ironing. I'd only got one iron, and you have to waste such a lot of time, awaiting for it to heat up each time. Another thing, it does waste the gas terrible. I mean you can't turn the gas right out every time you take the iron off – you'd be for ever lighting it.' (Topic Collection, Fuel, Box 3/c, Mass-Observation archive, University of Sussex). In 1934 the Electrical Association of Women claimed that electrification almost halved the time spent by housewives on ironing: Caroline Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: a History of Housework in the British Isles, 1650–1950*, London, 1982, p. 43. On the penetration of the electric iron in inter-war Britain see S. Bowden and A. Offer, 'The Technological Revolution that Never Was. Gender, Class and the Diffusion of

Household Appliances in Interwar England', in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 248–9.

18 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, London, 1960.

19 Freud, *Jokes*, p. 177.

20 Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption 1939–1955*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 203–55; I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the Gender Gap: the Conservative Party and the Women's Vote, 1945–1964', in *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880–1990*, ed. Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Cardiff, 1996, p. 201.

21 R. Plant, 'Notes on the Findings of the Public Opinion Polls', Labour Party, *RD 350*, April 1950; in Labour Party Archive, 1950 General Election, Box 2. For elaborations of this view see J. Hinton, 'Women and the Labour Vote, 1945–50', *Labour History Review* 57: 3, 1992, pp. 59–66; J. Hinton, 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal* 38, autumn 1994, pp. 129–31. It is ironic that the chauvinist misinformation that Morrison sought to correct should now be in danger of becoming accepted as the conventional wisdom among historians concerned to blame, not women, but a 'masculinist' Labour Party for its failure to accommodate their presumed consumerism: Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951–1966', *Journal of British Studies* 36, 1997, pp. 421–423.

22 Keith Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society*, London, 1979; K. Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State, Vol. 1: Britain in Search of Balance, 1940–61*, London, 1986; D. Ritschell, 'A Corporatist Economy in Britain? Capitalist Planning for Industrial Self-Government in the 1930s', *English Historical Review* 106: 1, 1991; Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens.*

23 Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. 2, Minister of Labour*, London, 1967.

24 N. Rollings, 'British Budgetary Policy 1945–54: A "Keynesian revolution?" ', *Economic History Review* 41, 1988, pp. 288, 290–1; G. C. Peden, *The Treasury and British Public Policy, 1906–1959*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 325–6, 413, 415–7. Neither author shows any awareness of the gender dimensions of this policy.

25 Findley Weaver, 'Taxation and Redistribution in the United Kingdom', *Review of Economics and Statistics* 32: 3, 1950, p. 203; Jim Tomlinson, *Democratic Socialism and Economic Policy: the Attlee Years, 1945–1951*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 252–3, 272–3 and 278–79; A. A. Rogow, 'Taxation and "Fair Shares" under the Labour Government', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 21: 2, May 1955, p. 205. Unlike economic policy makers, female social workers were much concerned with the distribution of income within the working-class household. This issue was central to Eleanor Rathbone's 'new' feminism and its talisman – the family allowance. The Coalition Government's attempt to deny mothers the right to claim family allowances in 1944 was one of the few issues capable of igniting feminist militancy across whole spectrum of the women's movement.

26 Geoffrey Browne with John Waller Hobson and Harry Henry, *Patterns of British Life: a Study of Certain Aspects of British People at Home, at Work and at Play, and a Compilation of some Relevant Statistics*, London, 1950, pp. 122–32, cited in Michael Young, 'The Distribution of Income within the Family', *British Journal of Sociology* 3, 1952, p. 317; G. Findlay Shirras, **'**Methods of Estimating the Burden of Taxation', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 106: 3, 1943, p. 221.

27 Young, 'Distribution of Income', p. 319.

28 Men sought to compensate for this by failing to increase housekeeping allowances paid to their wives in line with increased earnings, and it is likely that their consumption of alcohol and tobacco was sustained despite the four-fold increase in the price of these commodities since 1939: Young, 'Distribution of Income', pp. 316–17.

29 'It has been taken for granted that some members of a family cannot be rich while others are poor', Young, 'Distribution of Income', p. 305. An otherwise very valuable recent treatment of the political implications of the tax regime involved (Whiting, 'Income Tax, the Working Class and Party Politics', *Twentieth Century British History* 8: 2, 1997) retains this gender-blindness, reflecting, no doubt, the Treasury papers on which it is based.

30 While MPs were overwhelmingly in favour of payment to the mother, many went out of their way to explain that this did not imply any anxiety about the selfishness of husbands. Rhys Davies (a Labour MP from a Welsh mining background) protested that 'these notions about wives asking in a humiliating fashion for money from their husbands belong, I am afraid, to the aristocracy, and not to the working class' (House of Commons Debates, vol. 408, col.

2,353, 8 March 1945), a point echoed by the Labour Party's official spokesman in the debate, Jim Griffiths – another Welsh miner – House of Commons Debates, vol. 408, col. 2,287, 8 March 1945, and vol. 410, col. 2,061, 10 May 1945. Another Labour MP interrupted Eleanor Rathbone to describe such anxieties as 'a middle class problem': Montague, House of Commons Debates, vol. 404, col. 1,171, 3 Nov. 1944. Perhaps in deference to such attitudes, Labour women were careful not to argue the case on these grounds, offering reassurances that it was no part of their agenda to 'take away the husband's position as the economic head of the family': Mrs Adamson, House of Commons Debates, vol. 408, col. 2,295, 8 March 1945.

31 Young, 'Distribution of Income'. For a historical elaboration on Young's themes, see Laura Oren, 'The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England 1860–1950', in *Clio's Consciousness Raised. New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, New York and London, 1974.

32 S. J. Lundberg and others, 'Do Husbands and Wives Pool their Resources? Evidence from the UK Child Benefit', *Journal of Human Resources* 32: 3, 1997.

33 The phasing out of child tax allowances in favour of payment of child benefit to the mother, completed by April 1979, had been delayed in 1977 because some ministers feared that such a transfer 'from the wallet to the purse' at a time of wage restraint would be resented by male workers: Lundberg and others, 'Do Husbands and Wives Pool their Resources?', p. 467.

34 Weaver, 'Taxation and Redistribution', pp. 201–2.

35 Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion?*, p. 107; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, pp. 64, 85, 117. On the British Housewives League, see Hinton, 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League'; and Elizabeth McCarty, 'Attitudes to Women and Domesticity in England, circa 1939–1955', Oxford D.Phil., 1994.

36 Frank Trentmann, 'Bread, Milk and Democracy: Consumption and Citizenship in Twentieth-century Britain', in *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, ed. Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton, Oxford, 2001, p. 156.

37 Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the Gender Gap'; Black and Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the problem of gender'; Matthew Hilton, 'Consumer Politics in Post-war Britain', in Daunton and Hilton, *The Politics of Consumption*, pp. 247, 254; Matthew Hilton, 'The Female Consumer and the Politics of Consumption in Twentieth-century Britain', *Historical Journal* 45: 1, 2002, pp. 121 and 128.

38 Trentmann, 'Bread, Milk and Democracy'; Hilton, 'The Female Consumer'.

39 Martin Francis, 'Labour and Gender', in *Labour's First Century*, ed. Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, Cambridge, 2000; Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women. Women in British Working-class Politics, 1918–1939*, Cambridge, 1994; Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: the Women's Co-operative Guild from the 1880s to the Second World War*, London, 1998; Pat Thane, 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906–1945', in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harold Smith, Aldershot, 1990; Mike Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: the Labour Movement in Preston, 1880–1940*, Cambridge, 1987; J. Mark-Lawson, M. Savage, and A. Warde, 'Gender and Local Politics: Struggles over Welfare, 1918–1939,' in Linda Murgatroyd, M. Savage, J. Urry, and Sylvia Walby (eds), *Localities, Class and Gender*, London, 1985. For valuable discussions of women and the public sphere see particularly Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig J. Calhoun, Massachusetts, 1992, and Hilton, 'The Female Consumer'.

40 'It is not reasonable', wrote Mary Sutherland, 'to expect the young married women in industry to find time to attend meetings. They are already doing two jobs': Memo on Condition of the Party, for Labour Party National Executive Committee, 25 March 1942. Similarly Haydn Davies in *Labour Woman*, March 1942: 'We know only too well how many active members are lost to us because of the necessity of going out to work.' Later she complained about 'the lack of political consciousness among young women and girls in industry': Mary Sutherland, Report on Organisation and Work of Women, January 1944, LP NEC. For a contrasting view see, for example, Croucher, *Engineers at War,* p. 300.

41 Jenny Geddes, 'From My Notebook', *Labour Woman*, June 1946. Geddes had been provoked by a *Daily Herald* article advocating the Reilly Plan for the design of small urban communities, which had been backed by the 1944 Labour Party Conference. The article had suggested that the provision of facilities for communal cooking would prevent 'nearly half the nation's brain and labour power [going] down the sink', L. Wolfe, *Daily Herald*, 15 May 1946. She could not resist pointing out that matters were even worse for those archetypal

proletarians, the miners, all of whose labour, after all, went up in smoke! On the Reilly Plan, see David Matless, 'Taking Pleasure in England: Landscape and Citizenship in the 1940s', in *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930–1960*, ed. R. Weight and A. Beach, London, 1998, pp. 196–197.

42 Review of Electrical Association of Women report on post-war reconstruction in *Labour Woman*, April 1943.

43 Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Half Way to Paradise: Women in Post-War Britain, 1945–1968*, London, 1980, p. 16. Perhaps Wilson exaggerates. But this does not justify the complete omission of housework – as against motherhood – from one recent discussion of the wartime debate about women's citizenship: Sonya Rose, 'Women's Rights, Women's Obligations and the Contradictions of Citizenship in World War Two Britain', *European Review of History* 7: 2, 2000.

44 Sarah Benton, 'The 1945 "Republic" ', *History Workshop Journal* 43, 1997, pp. 255–6. In the case of the Women's Institutes it has recently been argued that 'the elevation of women's everyday tasks [in this case jam-making] to national significance helped English women in general to challenge the social construction of femininity', Maggie Andrews, ' "For home and country": Feminism and Englishness in the Women's Institute Movement, 1930–1960', in Weight and Beach (eds), *The Right to Belong*, pp. 120–3.

45 'The SJC is the Trade Union of the Working Housewives of Britain and can speak both with knowledge and authority on matters affecting the working conditions of the women in the home . . .', leader in *Labour Woman*, April 1943. See also *Labour Woman*, February 1945, p. 37; Pat Thane, 'Women of the British Labour Party', p. 130. The SJC was composed of representatives of the Labour Party Women's Sections, the Women's Co-operative Guilds, the TUC Women's Advisory Committee, trade unions organizing women, and a variety of other organizations of the women's labour movement. Although its secretary, Mary Sutherland, doubled as the Labour Party's Chief Woman Officer, the SJC was treated in Whitehall's search for corporatist partners as a non-party body. This occasioned protests from the Conservative Party, on the handling of which by the Attlee government see the extensive discussion in PRO POWE 14/394. The position was indeed ambiguous. In 1943, for example, the Organisation Committee of the Labour Party agreed to permit the SJC to retain the notional independence which allowed it 'to give evidence to Government Departments and Committees' on the understanding that the SJC would not use its access to Whitehall to put forward any views at odds with Party policy without first seeking approval from the Party – the independence was, indeed, notional. Minutes of Organisation Committee, 3 March 1943, LP NEC. The Labour women's use of this phrase – 'the housewives' trade union' – did not, however, reflect any tendency to view the relations between housewives and male breadwinners as analogous to those between workers and employers. When the Married Women's Association, a small feminist organization campaigning for legislation protecting the right of the married woman to a share of her husband's income, applied for membership of the TUC, Labour women dismissed the application, on the grounds not that housewives already had a trade union in the SJC, but that a housewives' trade union was a logical impossibility: 'a trade union is an association of employed persons formed for the purpose of negotiating wages and conditions . . . as housewives cannot be considered as gainfully employed, they would not come within this category'. TUC National Women's Advisory Committee, Minutes, 13 Oct. 1943, in TUC 61.5/3; see also SJC Minutes of 29 March, 8 April and 6 May 1943, LP NEC. The idea that housewives should organize to contest the authority of their actual paymasters – their husbands – was not one that recommended itself to Labour women. On the Married Women's Association, see Catherine Blackford, 'Wives and Citizens and Watchdogs of Quality: Post-War British Feminism', in *Labour's Promised Land. Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945–51*, ed. Jim Fyrth, London, 1995, pp. 60–70.

46 Mary Sutherland, Report to National Conference of Labour Women, October 1940, in TUC 65.2/2; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1959*, 1992, p. 158.

47 Richard James Hammond, *Food: the Growth of Policy*, vol. 1, London, 1951, p. 37.

48 *Labour Woman*, April 1941; Mary Sutherland, Report to NCLW, June 1942, in TUC 65.2/2.

49 B. Ayrton Gould, Report to NEC, 24 Sept. 1941, LP NEC; Mary Sutherland, Report to NCLW, June 1942, in TUC 65.2/2.

50 Mary Sutherland, Report to NCLW, June 1942, in TUC 65.2/2.

51 Hilton, 'Consumer Politics', p. 245; Hilton, 'Female Consumer', pp. 111–6; Trentmann,

'Bread, Milk and Democracy', pp. 146–52; Robert A. Bayliss, 'The Consumers Council 1918–21', *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics* 3, 1979, pp. 37–45.

52 Report of Labour Party Policy Committee, 40 April 1942, LP NEC; John. Burnett, *Plenty and Want: a Social History of Food in England from 1815 to the Present Day*, London, 1989, p. 291; PEP, *Planning* 230, 2 Feb. 1945, pp. 23–4; Annual Report of SJC, 1945, in TUC 62.14/1.

53 House of Commons Debates 1940–1, vol. 371 cols 505–6. The issue had already been rehearsed in parliament a year earlier. R. A. Bayliss, 'The Consumers' Council Bills, 1929–1939', *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics* 4, 1980, p. 121.

54 The following account is based on memoranda by Maclean, 22 May 1941, and Lloyd, 9 June 1941, in PRO MAF 99 1077.

55 'Those who had been hardest to convince would, with their still somewhat guilty consciences, become the best of these', he added, optimistically. Moreover, this official added, in a tone of engagingly optimistic cynicism, where the masses remained discontented 'popular criticism might be diverted from the ministry's work to the activity, or the supineness, of the Council'.

56 Minute by HJC, June 1941, MAF 99 1077. The one meeting he had attended had been dominated by H. M. Hyndman, the founding father of British Marxism.

57 Minute by HJC, June 1941, MAF 99 1077.

58 This was extended to cover problems arising from clothes rationing in June 1941 and its name changed to the Rationing and Prices Committee.

59 Memo on TUC Food Policy, 16 Sept. 1941, in TUC 183/3; Minutes of Advisory Committee to Ministry of Food, throughout, TUC 183.111/3; Advisory Committee papers, etc, TUC 183.121/1.

60 HC Deb 1940–1, vol. 371, 30 April 1941 col. 501.

61 Minutes of Food Advisory Committee, 24 July 1940. Similarly it was the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), not the SJC, to whom the Committee turned when asked to comment on details of changes in the rationing system; and it was the interests of shop assistants, not shoppers, which were their central concern here. Housewives' interests were considered only where they clashed with women's roles as waged workers – as with the problems arising from combining shopping with going out to work. Minutes of Food Advisory Committee, 2 April, 2 July and 7 Nov. 1941.

62 Memo of 22 May 1941, MAF 99 1077.

63 Minutes of Advisory Committee, 20 December 1939, 14 March 1940, TUC 183.111/3.

64 Report of Labour Party Policy Committee, 40 April 1942, LP NEC. See also Bayliss, 'The Consumers' Council Bills', p.121.

65 Minutes of Advisory Committee, 20 Dec. 1939, 1 April 1942, TUC 183.111/3.

66 Correspondence between Morgan Phillips and Walter Citrine, February-March 1942, TUC 183/3; Report of Labour Party Policy Committee, 40 April 1942, LP NEC.

67 Minutes of NEC meeting, 22 April 1942, LP NEC.

68 Minutes of NEC meeting, 22 July 1942, LP NEC.

69 The middle-class women's organizations represented by the Women's Group for Public Welfare were rather more successful in establishing themselves as 'a channel between the somewhat inarticulate consumer interest – mainly housewives – and Government departments': Harford speaking to Joint Conference of WGPW and SCWO, 23 June 1945, WF J2. See also press statement, 30 Jan. 1946, WF A42. Building on the inter-war work of organizations like the Electrical Association of Women, women like Caroline Haslett made themselves effective as mediators between Whitehall, business and the consumer. Matthew Hilton has argued that in doing so they were laying the basis for a post 1950s market-oriented consumer politics quite distinct from the collectivist politics of the Labour women: Hilton, 'Consumer Politics in Post-war Britain'. The fact that Labour women – rebuffed by the TUC – never considered seeking an alliance with the middle-class women's organizations bears testimony to the deep gulfs of distrust that continued to divide the women's movement, helping to negate whatever possibilities may have existed for women to establish themselves as an estate of the realm within the political economy of corporatism. On the Women's Group for Public Welfare, see Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War*, pp. 177–97.

70 Hilton, 'Female Consumer', p. 116.

71 Meeting of Women's Organisations at Ministry of Fuel and Power, 26 Sept. 1947 minutes, in TUC 292 183.24/4.

72 'Nobody could see any reliable way of finding out how quickly [the volunteers] were in

fact making personal contact with housewives . . . One had to hope for the best': 'The Domestic Fuels Saving Campaign', PRO INF 2 135.

73 David Ginsbourg, 'Meter Reading and the Fuel Target', 1947, PRO RG 23/126A.

74 Robertson, *Bleak Midwinter*, pp. 136–7; G. L. Watkinson, 'Domestic Fuel Rationing: draft proposals', 13 Feb. 1947, PRO T 273 305.

75 MO File Reports, 1449, 28 Oct. 1942, pp. 11–14; 1488, 18 Nov. 1942; 1526, 3 Dec. 1942.

76 MO File Report, 1488, 18 Nov. 1942.

77 Diary extract, 10 April 1942, in MO, TC Fuel, Box 1/c.

78 'It is quite clear that the average working-class housewife will work contentedly in the cold all day by herself, but as soon as any of the family is due home will put herself out to make a good fire': MO File Report 1488, 18 Nov. 1942. 'Women sometimes appear to feel that they are not doing their duty by their husbands if there is no fire ready for them in the evening. The fire is often more than a matter of warmth': MO File report 1449, 28 Oct. 1942, p. 14.

79 Report by C.G., 27 Nov. 1942, MO TC Fuel, Box 3/C.

80 MO File Report 1488, 18 Nov. 1942.

81 Appealing to women to devote more time to voluntary work in 1944 Lady Reading urged them to 'put first things first. Leave the beds undone: leave the house dirty; don't cook your husband's meal – let him jolly well get on with a piece of bread; but get on with the national job first!', *Surrey County Herald*, 2 June 1944. Her remark was widely reported and it provoked a vigorous backlash – including from the *Daily Mirror* which condemned it as ignorant talk by an upper-class lady who had no inkling of the moral investment placed in housework by ordinary working-class women. A. C. H. Smith with Elizabeth Immirzi and Trevor Blackwell, *Paper Voices. The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935–1965*, London, 1975, pp. 114–15.

82 MO File Report, 1488, 18 Nov. 1942. A letter addressed by one despairing housewife in 1941 to 'The Minister for Electric Light, Gas, etc' illustrates the kind of anxiety that the conflict between the housewife's duty to the state and her duty to her husband could arouse:

> I am very worried in my mind about things, being in charge of a house. I feel everything is up to we women to do what we can. I so wish you could enforce some sort of rationing . . . *I've* done all in my power – but when I tell you my husband turns night into day, and sits up until 3.00 or 3.30 am burning electric light, reading, how can I do what I would wish . . . If anything like this is going on over half the British Isles – it is high time rationing starts. These sort of people should be forced to be more considerate. It seems ghastly to 'split on ones' husband', but I think it is 'rotten' of him . . . In talking this over with a very patriotic woman, she advised my writing to you. Cannot an order be given 'all lights out at 11 pm' the same as demobilising our cars. Surely the factories should come first for our war weapons and people made to go to bed at a respectable hour. (Kathleen Green, 27 September 1941, in PRO POWE 14 19.)

For this middle-class woman, rationing was a way of transferring to the minister responsibility for resolving a crisis of domestic authority triggered by her desire to impose patriotic austerity on her husband (or perhaps just by her desire for undisturbed sleep). She wrote back a month later confessing that she herself indulged in the quite 'unnecessary luxury' of an 'Annual Permanent Wave'. She now thought that the Government should send the hairdressers into munitions factories: this would save much more electricity than anything she could achieve at home: 'so why ask for economy in our homes', she added peevishly, 'when this ['perms'] is one of the first things which should be stopped'.

83 Report on SJC meeting with Beveridge, 14 May 1942, Report of Chief Woman Officer to National Conference of Labour Women, June 1942, p. 15, in TUC 65.2/2; Second Meeting of the Sub-Committee of Women's Organisations at the Ministry of Fuel and Power minutes, 17 April 1947, in WF B12.